

A STUDY OF ECOLOGICAL IMPERIALISM: THE DEGRADATION OF GREEN CULTURE IN V S NAIPAUL'S THE GLASS PALACE

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Introduction

Alfred Crosby and Richard Grove, the British environmental historians coined the term 'ecological imperialism' that refers to 'the violent appropriation of indigenous land to ill-considered introduction of cash crops in colonized terrain. The Indian ecocritic, Ramachandra Guha, argues 'the need to bring postcolonial and ecocritical issues together as a means of challenging continuing imperialist mode of social and environmental dominance. Ghosh synthesizes history, autobiography, imperialism that has great impact on the mind of the reader. The colonial experiences and distress and miseries of the people are shown during the colonial period. In this novel, Ghosh presents ecological harm caused to the earth by imperialism and wars. Ghosh indicates how colonialism and wars imperialize and devastate individuals as well as the physical condition.

Terms: ecological, imperialism, postcolonial

Crosby in his historical studies *The Colombian Exchange and Ecological Imperialism* reflects on ways in which both material and ideas were exchanged between the colonizing and the colonized worlds. The settlers imported and introduced cash crops and cattle in the colonized terrain thereby exterminating local ecosystems and marginalizing the down trodden. As per postcolonial ecocritics Huggan and Tiffin's argument, postcolonial studies has "come to understand environmental issues not only as central to the projects of European conquest and global domination, but also inherent in the ideologies of imperialism and racism on which those project historically – and persistently – depend" (2).

The fourth novel of Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* concentrates on a family across three generations and set in Burma, Malaya and India during 1885. It consists seven parts and every part focuses on the important theme of the novel. In the part first, Mandalay depicts the British army attack on city and dethrone the royal family and occupied Burma. Kinwun Mingyi and Taingda are two senior ministers wanted the royal family, King Thebaw and Queen Suplayat under the British rule as they expect rich reward from British. Without war, King surrendered and people and soldiers looted the palace by stealing prestigious articles, King's jewels and ornaments from palace. The second part of the novel "Ratnagiri" depicts an enormous result of imperialism are shown. After dethroning the King, Thebaw, Burma is now under the monarch British rule. It has great effect on the mind of the people and the country. The next part of the novel The Money tree presents how orphan boy, Rajkumar enters into timber's business. The Weeding part deals with the second generation Neel who marries Manju. The Morning Side shows the result of Second World War on the characters. The Front presents suffering of the people due to war. The last segment of *The Glass Palace* reflects on the eventual

accomplishment of Independence by the Indian National Revolution and India.

Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* delineates an imperialism and human attitude to exploits the rich natural resources of Burmese Teak, oil and Malaya's Rubber. Ghosh highlights on the environmental destruction and devastation by man. The wars and exploiting natural resources made earth a victim in the hands of humans during imperialism. Ghosh realistically portrays the environmental issues along with war and history as its backdrop. The novel begins with the Anglo-Burmese War of 1885 and ends in the post Independence days. It also covers two World Wars and Indian Independence movement. The story deals with three generations and runs in three colonized countries: Burma, Malay and India. The vast canvas of this novel is handled by Ghosh very skillfully where everything is synthesized in a systematic way. In the words of Ira Pande:

This is a saga that might have drained the talents of the lesser novelist, stretching centuries and millennia and straddling the room of nations, India, Burma and Malay. But in the hands of the Ghosh, a skilled historian, an ambitious explorer, and a delicate fiction writer, it becomes a confluence of all three. Ghosh juggles history, fiction and travel writing with incredible sleight of hand, to create a tale that can be read differently as the history of Burma over the last two centuries, an everlasting romance between families and travelogue about a forgotten Buddhist territory. (23)

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The Glass Palace (2000) delineates the ecological, social and environmental destruction done by Western. In his letter to the Prize Board, he claims trustees and declares; "The question of how to remember the past lies at the core of the Glass Palace, and I feel that I would compromise the spirit of my book if I were to allow it to be inserted into that particular memorialization of the Empire that passes under the rubric of the Commonwealth." (Gupta 242-43)

For Ghosh, history shapes our socio-cultural identity. History, culture and identity of the people of the colonized countries are destroyed by imperialism. That's why Ghosh withdraws his novel from Commonwealth Literature Prizes. In reaction to this, Suketa Mehta wrote to Amitav Ghosh:

.....it is particularly perverse for a book such as *The Glass Palace* to be honoured by the remnants of the very empire that it is passionately condemns. It would be analogous to 'The Autobiography of Malcolm X' being given an award by the United Daughters of the Confederacy. They cannot conquer, rule and despoil us in one century and then attempt to sanitize their reputation by bestowing imperial honour on us in the next for pointing out what's been done to us. These prizes are a means of co-opting dissent, buying our peace. (96)

In the novel, Ghosh talks on colonized lands, interstitial spaces, for example, seas, streams and islands. He uses areas as settings to examine and scrutinize patriot records of imperialism and impacts. Imperialistic studies have a solid territorial accentuation, yet they harp on political or social spaces as opposed to their physical surroundings. Ghosh expresses that

colonial selfish attitude has changed the biodiversity of the region and rob socially and financially, forcing natives to leave their land.

In this novel, Ghosh presents ecological harm caused to the earth by imperialism and wars. Ghosh indicates how colonialism and wars imperialize and devastate individuals as well as the physical condition. This sort of purposeful natural predominance is alluded to as Ecological Imperialism. K. M. Munshi, in his *"The Ruin that Britain wrought"*, clearly states the drastic change due to imperialism:

The statement is made that Britain has given India stability. Did she? If she disarmed us, it was to see that we had not defied manipulation. If she enforced law and order, British officers whose key role was to keep India secure for Britain were to train up a vast police force under them; their safety in hand, more often than not, was to be bought by citizens on an almost universal scale by bribery. Except in self-defense or in defence of our land, which is considered sacred, our ability to resist has been broken. (93)

Imperialism influences the whole planet even today. Government has established in the human-centric perspective. Due to this colonial attitude, environmental destruction has been taken place and major changes have been taken place in environmental cycles of the planet.

The epic starts in the year 1885, when the British powers including for the most part of Indians, attack on Kingdome, joined by a little company of orderlies are driven out and went in a distant the place named Ratnagiri. The war started for timer wood between Timber Company and Burmese King. They would likely snatch all the natural resources from Burma. A generally obscure recorded certainty that teak gave the thought process to British colonization is unequivocally called attention to in the novel. Youthful Mathew, Saya John's child honestly tells Rajkumar:

The English are planning to send the Irrawaddy fleet on board. A war is about to happen. Dad said they needed all the teak in Burma. The King is not going to let them take it so they're going to do away with it. 'Rajkumar,' he screamed, smiling. A fight over, Wood? Who's ever heard of anything like that? (15)

The Burma refuses to accept demands of British. He is resolved to destroy British and defend the nation. The King conveys the message to British Governor in Rangoon. Accordingly, they send soldiers to the city and the war is begun.

He is a truly ecocritic as Sajalkumar Bhattacharya asserts in an article, "Ghosh is by turn a sociologist, a historian, a teacher, an essayist alive to a range of crucial contemporary issues from terrorism to the conservation of nature". (143) Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* concerns with British conquering Burma in 1885. It has seven parts and forty-eight chapters. It presents man's selfishness for land and money that leads to the destruction of ecology. He gives the vivid description of the Burmese forest and exploitation of environment by British and links to the history. Burma had a rich landscape and natural resources before invasion of British as Rajkumar, a pivotal character reflects the greediness of people. It shows the readers' eyes that something has been lost with the invasion of British People. Subha Tiwari asserts about *The Glass Palace*:

This is essentially a book about the corruption & cruelty of Europeans, colonialization... With insatiable greed, the British came to rich lands such as

India and Burma and deprived them of all wealth. Jungles through systematised mechanical ways of brutal slashing sound so barbaric. (6)

Ghosh asserts that involvement of man's exploitation with the natural resources is key for the destruction of environment. It presents the deforestation and exploitation of the Earth through many ways. They had killed birds, animals, and deforming the landscape and biodiversity. Burma has rich teak forests and the English captures Burma for trade.

Ghosh in *The Glass Palace*, describes the western technology destroys the natural landscape. On the name of modernisation and development, they have done everything to exploit the colonized Burma country. Once Rajkumar going with Uma has shown the result of the natural destruction due to development as stated, "The town seemed to be changing Uma beyond comprehension. (241). Deforestation is the major theme of this novel. Teakwood trees are cut down in large amount for industrial purpose. Trees are depicted as one of the significant role in the novel. Ghosh presents it in Burma as given:

Once the trees were chosen, they had to be destroyed and left to dry. The killing was done at a height of four feet and six inches from the ground by the girdle of incisions, narrow slits, cut deep into the timber. The vanquished trees were left to die where they stood, often for even more than three years. The trees will sound great pollutants, protests as they dropped, unloosing thunder blasts that could be heard miles away knocking down everything on their own, direction, rafts, saplings, looped nets, rattan, even though they were dead. (69)

Similarly, Ghosh presents that British exploits not only natural resources but also poor people who depends on forest for survival. Laborers were brought from the other regions for the deforestation of the Burma country. They worked under the critical dangerous situation where there was no guarantee of lives. The cruelty towards laborers is shown through the voice of Uma, "With your arrogance, your desire to take whatever you can at whatever cost, you're an animal. Do you suppose no one knows of the things you did to the people in control who couldn't protect themselves from women and children? You, Rajkumar, are no more than a slave and a rapist." (248)

The colonization and war can are major theme reflected in *The Glass Palace*. Ghosh asserts that there is no value of nature in the life of human being. British colonized the countries for the use of industry and money at any cost which results in degradation of environment. Due to war between Japanese and British, there is disorder and destruction on everything including nature and human. People suffer from starvation and hunger, Ghosh tries to depict the harsh reality of war as, "Wood bought food more easily than money or valuable"

After colonization, the drastic change has been taken place in the colonized region. The region is persuasively changed over into a region of colonized. English culture changes the place where there is Burma as per its very own advantages and laws. Burma is transformed from natural country into a growing business center point. Ghosh watches the change and surmises:

. . resources were being exploited with an energy and efficiency hitherto undreamt of. The Mandalay palace had been refurbished to serve the conquer's recondite pleasures: the west wing had been converted into a British club; the Queen's hall of audience had now become a billiard room; the mirrored walls were lined with months- old copies of *punch* and the *Illustrated London News*;

the gardens had been dug up to make room for tennis courts and polo grounds; the equisetetic little monastery in which Thebaw had spent his novitiate had become a chapel where Anglican priests administered the sacrament to British troops. (66)

The epic sets up individuals, thought about wild, is joined and resulting business abuse of wild. Government not just concerns the staggering consequences for network yet incorporates its unfriendly impacts on the colonized environment too. Imperialism is responsible for deforestation that is one of the real causes for the ecological destruction. In regard with deforestation, Pant, an anthropologist writes: "Human inference also brings a disastrous proportion to this complex mechanism in natural environment settings, leading to disasters and irreparable harm to the natural equilibrium of the ecosystem." (p 1)

A rich biodiversity region, the timberlands of Burma are exploited to make for industrial estate. As a result, many rubber and timber production industries had been established in the region. To build and grow their business plants, modern equipment brought to cut the trees and destroyed all biological systems of the region. It is fact that economic growth is responsible for degradation of environment.

The novel is an attempt to arise the people's awareness of protecting the earth and its inhabitants by particularly casting off the narrow anthropocentrism and by adopting land ethics to achieve a harmonious society. Further it is clarified that problems linked with environmental crisis are directly linked to authoritarianism and hierarchy. Exploitation and the destruction of the planet is intricately related and linked to the exploitation and oppression of human beings. The novel shows how the military violence is used against land and their inhabitants to secure the anthropocentric greed, illegal occupation and trading rights resulting in ecocide and series of environmental injustices.

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